

Mythography in Hanuman Chalisa

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Abstract

Hanuman Chalisa is a devotional hymn dedicated to Lord Hanuman, a connecting link between the material and spiritual worlds. The spiritually illumined and sublime verses of Chalisa fascinate every age group. Its recitation energizes the chanters with strength, energy, positive vibes, and soothing effects. For some, its recitation is a ritual exercise; for others, it is a panacea for all ailments; and for some, it is a help in spiritual evolution. The appeal and impact of Chalisa are very high, and its chanting fills the people with devotion and love for Hanuman Ji. The Chalisa represents many myths. Rejecting the conventional and popular meaning of myth, which means falsehood, Devdutt Pattanaik advocates a new meaning: 'Myth is not scientific truth but subjective, intuitive, and cultural truth grounded in faith. Myth is essentially a cultural construct, a common understanding of the world that binds individuals and communities together. The present paper aims to study various myths that the Chalisa abounds with.

Keywords: Transcendental, Empowering, Subjective truth, Humility, Tutelary

Hanuman is the most popular deity in this country. – G. S. Altekar, Studies on Valmiki's Ramayana (1987:265)

Hanuman Chalisa is a devotional hymn dedicated to Lord Hanuman, a connecting link between the material and spiritual worlds. He is a transcendental deity, but he lives in this mundane world to worship Lord Rama and to grace his devotees. He stands for complete devotion, submission and self-abnegation. Chalisa is composed by Saint Goswami Tulsidas, the author of the *Ramacharitamanasa*. The Chalisa has become, in today's time, the most popular mantic text. It is chanted individually as well as collectively. Its recitation energizes the chanters with strength, energy, positive vibes, and calming effects and helps in overcoming physical and psychological ailments. The rhythmic lines are written in Awadhi, an old dialect of Hindi, one of the many languages of India yet are easily

understandable. The spiritually illumined and sublime verses of Chalisa are lyrical, memorable, comprehensible, vibrant and empowering. It fascinates people of every age group, class, and caste. It mesmerizes all, no matter if a person is a city or village dweller, educated or uneducated, male or female, rich or poor. It "has recently acquired a popularity possibly exceeding that of any other short text in Hindu tradition." (*Hanuman's Tale*, 99) Devdutt Pattanaik says about it: "It is the most powerful expression of personal Hinduism that one can encounter on India's streets." (*My Hanuman Chalisa*, 1) For some, its recitation is a ritual exercise; for others, it is a panacea for all ailments; and for some, it is a help in spiritual evolution.

The appeal and impact of Chalisa are very high, and its chanting fills the people with devotion and love for Hanuman Ji. It has been said that words carry the vibration,

consciousness, and thought process of the person who speaks them. Goswami Tulsidas was a great devotee of Lord Hanuman. Hanuman Chalisa reverberates with his devotion and firm faith in his cherished deity, *Ishta Devata*, and charges the devotees with the same devotion who chant it. His daily visit to Nandi Taura's Hanuman temple, almost 12 k.m. away from his home town, Rajapur, reveals his great devotion for Lord Hanuman. One day, the rain and flow of the drain blocked his way. To fulfil the heart's pinning for glimpses of his lord (Darshan), he used to make the figure of Hanuman ji from the paste of sandalwood and stone on a mound in Rajapur. He worshipped this figure, considering it Hanuman. One day after puja, he forgot to delete the shape of Hanuman. When Tulsidas reached that place the next day, the shape made by sandalwood paste appeared in the mound, which could not be erased. Since then, Tulsi Das has started worshipping this idol. This place is known as Sankat Mochan (liberator from distress) Hanuman Temple. It has been said that he composed Hanuman Chalisa, at this place. There are many stories related with the place where Tulsidas composed Chalisa. According to another belief, Tulsidas composed Hanuman Chalisa in the ancient Hanuman temple located in Connaught Place, Delhi.

The Chalisa represents many myths. There are two common understanding prevalent about myth. First, it is an imaginary, absurd, and fabricated narrative and irrational notion about the world: "In general a myth is a story which is not 'true' and which involves (as a rule) supernatural beings – or at any rate supra-human beings." (Cuddon, 453) Second, it is a system of beliefs, value terms, and sacred

ideas of a community inherited over generations. It is not the truth, but a truth. It is not an imaginary tale but a real-life experience of primordial society. It is not a universal truth but a personal and cultural one. Myth is not a story told as history, but history told as a story. It requires faith, not logic. Rejecting the conventional and popular meaning of myth as the false, the irrational, and the unreasonable understanding of life, Devdutt Pattanaik embraces a new definition of myth as a "subjective truth expressed in stories, symbols, and rituals that shapes all cultures, Indian or Western, ancient or modern, religious or secular. The Sanskrit word for subjective truth is *mithya*—not the opposite of objective truth, but a finite expression of *satya*, that which is infinite." (*Myth = Mithya*, 11) He further adds, 'Myth is not scientific truth but subjective, intuitive, and cultural truth grounded in faith.' (*Myth = Mithya*, 12) It cannot be measured or comprehended logically or rationally. It is primarily 'a cultural construct, a common understanding of the world that binds individuals and communities together... all myths make profound sense to one group of people. Not to everyone. They cannot be rationalized beyond a point.' (*Myth = Mithya*, 13)

The 40 verses and three couplets (dohas) of Chalisa echo and reverberate with many myths. Each line literally, metaphorically, mythologically, and symbolically depicts a narrative about the form, grandeur, and strength of Hanuman and the miracles executed by him. Since childhood, Hanuman Ji has performed many incredible tasks. When he was an infant, considering the sun as an apple, he leaped from his cradle towards the sun. He jumped across the sea towards Lanka to

know the whereabouts of Goddess Sita. To save the life of Laxman, he brought the whole mountain to bring Sanjivani herb. Each line invites us to take a deep dive into his extraordinary vigour, devotion, and loyalty to Lord Rama. Hanuman allegorically stands for devotion and the force of yoga. He brings ‘union between the individual soul, the jivaatma (Sita), with the cosmic soul, the paramatma (Rama), which is separated by the ego (Ravana).’ (*Myth = Mithya*, 170)

The beginning couplet of Chalisa invokes the grace of the Guru and the God. The blessings and grace of both are needed to execute any work. The Guru, the living entity -*Sakar*, is needed to give outer shape, and the God Nirakar is needed to give inner. In the second couplet, the devotee asks for strength, intelligence, and wisdom: “bala-buddhi vidya dehoo mohee.” (*My Hanuman Chalisa*, 12) These three qualities are a rare combination to achieve or execute any work. Brain and brawn, strength and intelligence are related to worldly power, but vidaya is higher knowledge, the knowledge of the Oneness, the consciousness of Unity: “the state of Vidya is a state of self-realisation, the realisation of oneness and universality.” (*Isha Upanishad*, 138) Hanuman is a symbol of a rare combination of strength, knowledge, humility, and devotion. He is the highly cultured, scholarly, and energetic, mighty zoomorphic god of the Hindus. He is virile, heroic (*vira*), servile and self-effacing (*dasa*). He uses various strategies according to the situation to handle different sorts of people whom he met.

On his way to Lanka, Hanuman confronts three female demoness: Surasa, Simhika, and Lankini. Without fighting, he won over Sursa with his intelligence and

wit. He killed the wicked and wily Simhika, and to subdue and threaten Lankini, he slapped her with amazing strength. Surasa was the first one who obstructed his path. He met her while crossing the ocean. He asked her to let him go. But she informed him that he could not cross over until he entered her mouth. He devised a plan to get rid of her without harming her. He enlarges his size, making Surasa open her mouth wider. He then shrinks to the size of a bee in an instant and zips in and out of Surasa's mouth. Because Hanuman outwitted Surasa with his quickness, she had no choice but to let him pass:

jasa surasā badanu barhāvā, tāsū
ḍmuna kapi ṛuupa dekhāvā ... badana
paithi puni bāhera āvā, māgā bidā tāhi
siru nāvā. mohi suranha jehi lāgi
pathāvā, budhi bala maramu tora mai
pāvā. (*Sri Rāmacaritamānasa
Sundarakānd*, 27-28)

The second demoness was the cunning Simhika. She can detect her victims by their shadow. The same trick, she applied to Hanuman. She seizes his shadow and pulls him into her jaws. Without resistance, he contracts himself to the point where she is compelled to swallow him rather than bite him. He killed her by expanding enormously in her stomach and escaping by ripping out of her entrails: nisicari eka simdhu mahu rahai, ° kari māyā nabhu ke khaga gahai...tāsū kapatu kapi turatahi chinhā. tāhi māri mārutasuta birā, (*Sri Rāmacaritamānasa Sundarakānd*, 29-31) Commenting about the sharp intelligence of Hanuman, Devdatt writes in *My Hanuman Chalisa*: “While he first contracts and then expands to escape Simhika, Hanuman expands and later contracts to escape Surasa, the mother of serpents. While he

uses brute force to kill Simhika, he uses cunning trick to escape Surasa.” (62)

The third demoness, he met at the gate of Lanka was Lankini. She is the guardian-goddess of Lanka, protecting it from intruders. He took a very diminutive form to escape from the sight of Lankini. She spotted him and wanted to eat him. He bounced her to the ground, making her realize that he was no ordinary monkey, but the monkey destined to defeat Ravana: nâma lamkini eka niscari, ...muthikâ eka mahâ kapi hani, rudhira bamata dharani° dhanamani. (Sri Râmacaritamânsa Sundarakând, 39-41) ‘The defeat of Simhika, Surasa and Lankini marks the beginning of the end of Ravana’s rule.’ (My Hanuman Chalisa, 62)

Hanuman has a very balanced personality. He always used his senses to handle the situation. On his way to Lanka he came across three mountains. There was a beautiful mountain on the edge of the sea from where he started his journey towards Lanka. To feel the blessings and grace of Rama, he took the Lord’s name again and again. Thereafter, he playfully jumped on the mountain with great speed. The mountain on which Hanuman stepped and jumped immediately sank into the underworld:

simdhu tira eka bhûdharma sumdara,
kautuka kûudi caRheu tâ mûpara.
bâra raghubira sabhâri,
tarakeu pavanatanaya bala bhâri.
jehi giri carana dei hanumamtâ,
caleu so gâ pâtâla turamtâ. (Sri
Râmacaritamânsa Sundarakând,
21)

The second mountain that Hanuman came across was a mountain, namely Mainak. The Ocean God ordered Mainak to give refuge to Hanuman, the messenger of Lord Shree Rama. He thought that Hanuman may be tired after covering the long distance. So, some arrangements should be made for his rest to remove his tiredness. Hanuman touched the mountain softly with his hand, saluted him, and politely declined his offer of rest. He can't rest unless he accomplish his duty. After he crossed the ocean, he came to Lanka. Here, he saw a very enormous mountain. He gave up his fear and ran to climb it. From the top of this mountain, he had an overview of Lanka. He came to Lanka in search of the goddess Sita. He was trying to understand the place where Ravana may have kept the abducted Sita. Thus, Hanuman treated differently the three mountains that he came across as per his needs.

Hanuman to know the identity of others or to handle a situation disguised or adapt himself in a different form. Hanuman adapts or changes his physical appearance to suit various situations. He looked like a little, harmless monkey to the terrified Sita. He was very emotional and compassionate while interacting with Sita in the Ashoka Garden. To teach a lesson to the haughty Ravana and his battalion, he took on a very enormous and fearsome shape. He transforms himself from a non-threatening monkey to a giant to burn Lanka, the territory of Ravana: “Sukshma roop dhari Siyahi dikhava. Vikat roop dhari Lank jarava, ... Bhima roop dhari asur sanghare.” He took a small vulnerable form before frightened Sita and took a wild-giant-fearsome form to burn Lanka and to kill demons. (My Hanuman Chalisa, 55–60) He

is a shape-shifter who is aware of the shapes that other people react to.

Hanuman is capable of handling any tough situation dexterously because of his virtuosity, versatility, and humility: “*Vidyavaan guni ati chatur.*” The word “Vidyavaan” is used for Hanuman. He was scholarly, like the demonic Ravan. But he uses his acumen to assist and defence others. Hanuman saw Ram and Lakshman meandering aimlessly in the forest. To know about their whereabouts he disguised himself as a mendicant. He was very careful while conversing and questioning the Raghu brothers. His refined language, scholarly wit, and rhetorical skills earn him Rama’s praise. On the advice of Hanuman, Rama got ready to meet Sugriv, the monkey king. He disguised himself as a Brhamin again when he met Vibhishan in Lanka. Lanka was the territory of Rama’s enemy. He was surprised when he saw Vibhishan was taking the name of Rama with great reverence. So to know about Vibhishan, he became a Brahmin: *sādhu te hoi na kārāja hāni. bipra rūpa dhari bacana sunāe, sunata bibhsana uthi taha° āe (Sri Rāmacaritamānasa Sundarakānd, 49)*

Hanuman Chalisa could be divided into three segments. These three parts eulogises Hanuman’s life, his form, and his incredible work not in a linear way but circuitously. One moves back and forth. In the first segment, Tulsidas talks about the different forms, powers, and parents of Hanuman. He is praised in most extravagant terms. He has the ocean of wisdom and goodness: “*gyan gun sagar*”; unmatched and peerless might: *atulit bala dhama*”; valiant, just, and having limbs as hard as a thunderbolt: “*Mahabir Bikram Bajrangi*”; well versed in all sciences, full of virtues, and always eager to complete the missions of Sri Rama:

“*Vidyavaan guni ati chatur. Ram kaj karibe ko aatur*”; and being venerated by everyone due to his great strength and courage: “*Tej prataap maha jag bandan.*”

The second segment is about the great wonders performed by him. He fetched the life-saving herbs and saved the life of Lakshman: “*Laye Sanjivan Lakhan jiyaye*”; he showed the way to Vibhishan and Sugreev: “*Tumharo mantra Vibhishan maana. Lankeshwar bhaye sub jag jana*”; in his childhood days, he mistook the rising sun for a fruit and jumped into the skies to grab it: “*Yug sahastra jojan par Bhanu. Leelyo tahi madhur phal janu*”; he crossed the vast ocean: “*Prabhu mudrika meli mukh mahee. Jaladhi langhi gaye achraj nahee.*”

In the third segment, Lord Hanuman, a powerful deity and saviour is invoked so that he can remove obstacles and provide protection. The Chalisa resonates with the belief of devotees that Hanuman can save them from various ailments, negative energies, evil influences, and physical or occult dangers. The gentle rhythmic lines of Chalisa calm the nervous heart and terrified brain. By the grace of Hanuman, difficult and challenging tasks could be executed effortlessly: “*Durgam kaj jagath ke jete. Sugam anugraha tumhre tete.*” They experience contentment and delight who seek refuge in Him. With Hanuman as a guardian, there is nothing to fear: “*Sab Sukh Lahe Tumhari Sarna. Tum rakshak kahu ko darna.*” He dispels ill astuteness and is the friend of individuals who possess sound intellect: “*Kumati nivar sumati ke sangi.*” The auspicious and powerful name of Hanuman keeps all negativity and evil spirits away: “*Bhoot pisaach nikat nahin aavai. Mahabir jab naam sunavae.*” Those who chant your names get all diseases and all kinds of pain eradicated: “*Nase rog harae*

sab peera. Japat nirantar Hanumat Beera.” His blessings remove the sins and pains of all the births: "Janam-janam ke dukh bisraavai.” One who recites this Chalisa a hundred times is released from all bondages and will attain great bliss: “Jo sat bar path kare koi. Chhutehi bandhi maha sukh hoyi.” One who reads and recites this Hanuman Chalisa, all his works get accomplished: “Jo Yeh Padhe Hanuman Chalisa, Hoye Siddhi Saakhi Gaurisa.”

Lord Hanuman is a tutelary, a protector, and a healer, worshipped because of his exemplary qualities as well as his continuing physical presence on earth through this small text Hanuman Chalisa. He is a rare combination of bravery and humility that everyone needs today. May he grant us sagacity and strength and remove all our afflictions and short comings. May he dwell in our heart together with Rama, Lakshman, and Sita.

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